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RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0771
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RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE 1917
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 9697
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR 2610
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0559
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NEW DELHI 000180

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [SCUL](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: THE BROKEN BJP EMBRACES VOTE-LOSING HINDUTVA

REF: A. NEW DELHI 9761

[1](#)B. NEW DELHI 9376

Classified By: PolCouns Geoff Pyatt, for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: At its recently concluded "silver jubilee celebration" in Mumbai (septel) the BJP failed to overcome its deep divisions, failed to name a new President capable of uniting the party, failed to adopt a voter-friendly platform, and unenthusiastically embraced Hindutva and continued domination by the RSS. Most commentators see a party that remains adrift and in decline. Congress and the UPA are now confident of remaining in power in New Delhi until 2009. Congress appears more worried about the challenge posed by the Left and regional parties than that of the opposition NDA. The current BJP, overshadowed by xenophobic proponents of Hindutva, is likely to continue moving away from close partnership with the US, leaving the UPA as the group most enthusiastic about improved US/India ties. Vajpayee and Advani, the architects of the New India, now seem hopelessly lost. End Summary.

Good-bye Vajpayee, So Long Advani

[1](#)2. (U) The BJP National Executive met in Mumbai for a five day meeting from December 26, in what was billed as a "silver jubilee celebration" of 25 years of the party. As expected, LK Advani stepped down as party president. His replacement is Rajnath Singh, a former Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh (UP). At the conclave, former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee announced that for health reasons he would no longer contest for election and was not available to run as the Party's candidate for Prime Minister. Details of the meeting

will be presented septel.

A Party Adrift

¶3. (C) The BJP, which has been plagued by disunity, corruption allegations, an intense leadership struggle, and poor electoral performance (Ref B), tried to put the best possible face on the meeting, but failed to convince many outside of the party faithful. Most pundits, including those from the right, argued that the party has declined to a shadow of its former self.

¶4. (C) Twenty five years ago, the BJP presented itself as "the arty with a difference," that would eschew corruption, hypocrisy and ostentation in favor of discipline, honesty, and a spartan lifestyle. There is a consensus among political observers that the BJP no longer represents these values and is now pat of India's political "mainstream," characterized by corruption, greed, and showy displays of ill-gotten wealth. The recent capture on camera of BJP MP's accepting bribes was cited repeatedly in the press as evidence of a party adrift and lacking a moral focus.

A Leadership Crisis

¶5. (C) The selection of Rajnath Singh will do little to alleviate the party's bitter leadership problems. Vajpayee and Advani were the leaders that kept the RSS and non-RSS elements of the BJP together, motivated the party rank and

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file and expanded the BJP's appeal beyond a small cadre of true believers. All agree that Rajnath Singh, a regional politician with no base outside of UP, will not replace the two old giants and will prove to be little more than a placeholder until a true leader emerges. The BJP had to turn to Singh as a consensus candidate, as the deep divisions within the second-tier leadership prevented them from agreeing on who would take over the reins of the party.

Regionalism and Caste

¶6. (C) Singh's selection also emphasizes the BJP's inability to play the game of caste politics. The naming of Singh, a member of the Rajput (Kshatriya) caste, is linked to the expulsion of Uma Bharati, a noted OBC (other backward caste) leader, and the departure of Vajpayee (a Brahmin). These developments will further convince the increasingly powerful Dalits (formerly untouchables) and OBCs that they have no home in the BJP. The Brahmins and Rajputs are bitter enemies in many states. Singh's selection and Vajpayee's exit will encourage the already ongoing defection of the powerful Brahmins from the BJP to Congress and regional parties.

¶7. (C) During the conclave, the BJP leadership announced its intention to "take back" UP, which used to be the heartland of the party, from the regional parties that now control it. Singh's ascension was supposed to rally the people of UP behind the BJP, but is likely to have little impact. In the state's caste-ridden politics, Singh has little or no support outside of the Rajputs, who are already committed to the BJP. All agree that Dalit leader Mayawati and her BSP party are preparing to expel Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav and assume control of the UP government. Political insiders tell us that Mayawati and Congress have already formed an electoral alliance, with Mayawati purportedly agreeing to allow Congress to expand from its current 10 seats to 50 or 60, while Mayawati cements her hold on power in UP.

¶8. (C) The BJP's expulsion to the political wilderness in India's largest state would further shrink the party's declining base. It has virtually no chance of winning any of the five state elections scheduled for 2006 (Kerala, West

Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Assam) and even the NDA victory in Bihar demonstrated that the BJP has become dependent on regional parties throughout its former base in the Hindi belt.

The Return to Hindutva

¶9. (C) With nary a dissenting voice, the BJP leadership swore allegiance to the RSS and Hindutva at the Mumbai conclave, and Rajnath Singh pledged to focus the party on "cultural nationalism" and "integral humanism" (code words for Hindutva). The party's significant non-RSS wing was silent. The non-RSS wing would prefer to distance the BJP from Hindutva and recast it as a "pro-business" and "pro-free trade" party. In an "India Today" interview Advani made the point that there is no distance between himself and the Sangh Parivar (family of Hindu organizations), while insisting that "the RSS does not tell us (the BJP), do this or don't do that," implicitly challenging the logic of the hardliners.

¶10. (C) The party's embrace of Hindutva in Mumbai will not

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resolve these inherent differences. Hindutva could also hurt the BJP at the polls, where most voters reject religious appeals and embrace globalization. Vajpayee, as the party's standard-bearer, succeeded in downplaying Hindutva to broaden the party's appeal. With Vajpayee now out of the picture, Hindutva could prove to be a serious electoral liability.

Xenophobic Foreign Policy

¶11. (C) The RSS has long cultivated a xenophobic world view that demonized Pakistan, Bangladesh, all other Muslim countries, and the US. With the Sangh Parivar in control, the BJP's foreign policy orientation will likely become more isolationist and more nationalistic. The trajectory was indicated by the December 27 condemnation of improved US/India relations by Jaswant Singh and other party heavyweights (Ref A).

Congress Delighted

¶12. (C) Most objective commentators agreed that the Mumbai conclave indicated that the BJP was bent on following counterproductive initiatives and policies. In a January 4 meeting, Congress insider GS Bali, who is currently the Tourism Minister in Himachal Pradesh, told Poloff that his party was elated by the outcome of the Mumbai conclave, which indicated a party unprepared to return to power anytime soon.

Bali and other Congress leaders are now confident that the UPA will remain securely in power until its term expires in ¶2009.

¶13. (C) Bali asserted that most within Congress no longer view the BJP as a serious challenge and are more worried that the Left Front (LF) and regional parties will form a "third front" capable of challenging the UPA. He pointed out that because of BJP mismanagement, the NDA has shrunk from 24 parties to only 10 and predicted that more would depart in the months ahead. He was concerned, however, that former NDA parties would be more comfortable in a third front arrangement with the LF than with the UPA.

Comment - Prospects for the Future

¶14. (C) As Vajpayee and Advani fade away, there is little to indicate that the BJP has moved to end its divisiveness and unite to play the role of a credible opposition. Instead, the divisions between ambitious second tier leaders, caste and regional groupings, the RSS and non-RSS cadre, and the BJP and its NDA allies have only grown more intense. This

increases the danger that the party could split or face growing defections in the months and years ahead. Continued BJP decline and division could benefit the LF and regional parties, who would like to cooperate to fill any political vacuum and take over the role of the opposition from the hapless BJP.

¶15. (C) With the BJP distancing itself from the US and the Left/regional opposition heavily influenced by the Left's anti-globalization agenda, the UPA may be left as the most outspoken proponent of closer India/US ties, which remain popular among India's rising middle class. The UPA could also try to use these developments to its advantage by

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warning of the dangers that a change of government could present to the India's growing ties to the US, and the economic benefits this brings. As such, they will have stolen the very platform that brought the BJP so much praise and success in the relatively recent past.

¶16. (U) Visit New Delhi's Classified Website:
(<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/sa/newdelhi/>)
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